DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 827 FL 017 633

AUTHOR Putnam, Mark Richard
TITLE Using Proverbs and Sayings in the ESL/EFL Classroom.
PUB DATE Aug 88
NOTE 92p.; Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of Master of Arts Degree, School for International Training.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Master Theses (042) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Context; *English (Second Language); *Idioms; Oral Language; *Pronunciation; *Proverbs; Reading Instruction; Second Language Instruction

ABSTRACT

The use of proverbs and other sayings in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is discussed. The proverb is defined and its distinguishing characteristics are examined. The methods and reasons for using these characteristics today are discussed, and examples are given. The specific use of proverbs in teaching oral communication, pronunciation, reading, and cultural awareness is described and justified, and practical classroom activities focusing on each of these skill areas are provided. A list of proverbs and sayings with corresponding values and beliefs and a collection of proverbs and sayings found in newspapers and magazines are appended. (Author/MSE)

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USING PROVERBS AND SAYINGS IN THE ESL/EFL CLASSROOM

BY

MARK RICHARD PUTNAM
B.A. University of North Carolina 1979

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School For International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont, U. S. A.

FL017633

August 1988

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the rationale and use of proverbs and sayings in the English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classroom. The proverb is defined and its distinguishing characteristics are examined in depth. Drawing on these characteristics, an examination is made and examples are given of how and why proverbs are used today. This provides a basis for the justification of teaching proverbs to ESL/EFL students specifically in the areas of Oral Communication and Pronunciation, Reading and Cultural Awareness. Further rationale for teaching proverbs in each of these areas is given. Practical classroom activities which focus on each of these skill areas are provided.

ERIC Descriptors: English (Second Language), Proverbs, Language Fluency, Language Usage, Oral Language, Pronunciation, Reading Skills, Cultural Awareness

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Assumptions on Teaching and Learning

II. CHARACTERISTICS AND USES OF PROVERBS 7

Properties of Proverbs

Uses of Proverbs Today: Advertising

Uses of Proverbs Today: The Newspaper

III. PROVERBS IN TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION AND PRONUNCIATION 23

Rationale

Classroom Activities

IV. PROVERBS IN TEACHING READING 32

Rationale

Classroom Activities

V. PROVERBS IN TEACHING CULTURAL AWARENESS 42

Rationale

Classroom Activities

APPENDIX

1. PROVERBS AND SAYINGS WITH CORRESPONDING VALUE AND BELIEF 49

2. A COLLECTION OF PROVERBS AND SAYINGS FOUND IN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES 54

BIBLIOGRAPHY 82

I. INTRODUCTION

Assumptions on Teaching and Learning

Before delving into using proverbs in the ESL/EFL classroom, an understanding of my assumptions about teaching and learning is in order. As teachers each of us hold different beliefs about teaching and learning. An understanding of my own assumptions should make the ideas put forth in this paper easier to grasp. This ought to put into perspective, the ideas and activities mentioned later as only small pieces in the process our students go through when learning a second language.

1. There are as many approaches to learning as there are students.

Learning a language is an extremely varied process. It would be a teacher's dream come true that all students learned in the same way, but this is not the case. Just as our students are unique individuals, they also learn in different ways. As a teacher, this tells me that I should have a knowledge of how people learn and I should be using a variety of methods to reach all of my students.

2. The student is in control of his/her learning.

Each student is a person capable of making decisions that affect learning on his/her own. The teacher cannot make the student learn if the student does not choose to do so. The student is responsible for the direction and quality of his/her learning. The teacher is there to facilitate this process.

3. The classroom should be student-centered.

If the student is to have control over his/her learning, the class itself must so that the focus on the student. To accomplish this, the teacher must step back and allow the student the freedom needed to take control. In a student-centered classroom the student works with the language and the teacher works with the students. This means accepting each individual student at whatever level s/he may be and recognizing that all students will not learn at the same rate or in the same way.

4. What is taught should be relevant to student's wants and needs.

This assumption is a by-product of giving the students control of their learning and making the classroom student-centered. If the classroom is truly student-centered, then it is the teacher's responsibility

to meet the student's wants and needs as they relate to the class.

5. The language taught should be natural and communicative.

If what is taught is relevant to what the students want and need, the language will then be natural and communicative. The teacher should keep in mind that the reason the student is there is to learn to function and communicate in the outside world. To achieve this goal, the classroom then will be as much like the "real" world as possible. This means using realia and recreating "real" situations.

6. As a teacher, I am dealing with the whole student.

Working with the whole student means the affective side of the student cannot be ignored. It also means the teacher should be sensitive to the student's feelings. It is unrealistic to think that a student can come into a classroom and put his/her feelings on hold for the duration of the class. The affective side is directly related to how and how much a student will learn.

7. A community should be created in the classroom.

In this community students feel a responsibility to each other and the community as a whole. Rather than just feeling an obligation to him/herself, the student should also feel an obligation to the classroom community. Therefore, the student-student relationship becomes important. Students learn from and are concerned about each other and each other's progress. Developing a community provides an opportunity for all students to develop their language skills together. Competition is replaced by cooperation. The teacher is directly responsible for creating a community in the classroom. To further meet this need, the teacher must shape the classroom environment and restructure classroom activities accordingly.

8. Security is necessary for the student.

Security provides a base for the student to experiment with the language. If the student is to truly work with the language at his/her own pace and in his/her own way, then the student must have the security and freedom to take risks and experiment with the language. Again it is the teacher's responsibility to structure the classroom and the activities so as to provide security. Security is at the center of the whole classroom. It gives the affective side a chance to flourish. Besides being at the base of the student-language relationship and providing the student with the freedom to experiment with the language, security

is also key in the student-teacher relationship. It is essential that the student trust and be trusted by the teacher. Security is also at the heart of the student-student relationship. If there is security here the student will not feel pressure to perform or succeed. Security provides the base for all of these relationships.

9. New awarenesses need to be created.

These awarenesses may be of the language, but they are certainly not limited to this. Besides expanding awarenesses of the language, by making students aware in other areas of their lives, this will in turn give them the power to make conscious decisions that will affect them. Therefore, my role as a teacher is quite influential and powerful. As a teacher, I can have an effect on my students as individuals and members of a world community. This is not to be taken lightly.

10. Culture is omnipresent.

Culture colors everything we do or say. Just as there is a linguistic factor to language, there is also a cultural factor. As a teacher, making my students aware of the cultural factor in language is another responsibility. Also being aware of how my culture has affected me is important. Being aware of other cultures and of ourselves as cultural beings is necessary if we are to achieve

greater cross-cultural understanding. As cultural beings, we are all products of a culture which has influenced us in some way. An awareness of this by the teacher is essential in order to see how his/her own attitudes, behavior, values and beliefs have been affected by his/her culture.

Proverbs are an excellent vehicle for coming closer to meeting all of these ideals. Using proverbs has brought my students closer to the language by helping create a total picture in the classroom. Through their many clues about how a culture thinks and what a culture believes, proverbs have brought my students more cultural awareness. Proverbs, because they are so prevalent, natural and communicative, have aided my students in gaining fluency. Because of these factors and others, proverbs have helped increase the linguistic and cultural competencies of my students. But proverbs do not just contain these elements. Proverbs have several other outstanding characteristics. All of these elements combined point to their common use in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They are extremely complete units of language. If our goal as teachers is to make the classroom as natural, communicative and realistic as possible, proverbs are ideal as one means for meeting this challenge.

II. CHARACTERISTICS AND USES OF PROVERBS

Proverbs and Sayings are universal. They exist in all languages and cultures throughout the world. Older proverbs and sayings are traditional bits of wisdom and pieces of history which have been passed on from generation to generation. Newer proverbs and sayings are reflections of our times and will likewise be passed on to generations to come. Proverbs, both new and old, reflect a way of thinking about, looking at and interpreting the world. If we analyze them in depth, we will find they are actually whole individual units which exist in language. They have their own separate and unique characteristics which set them apart from other pieces of language.

In the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, proverbs and sayings have been too often dismissed as cliches and as a result have been ignored. The purpose of this paper is to point out the usefulness of proverbs and sayings to both teachers and students of English as a second language. More specifically it will be shown how proverbs can be used and

applied in the areas of teaching oral communication and pronunciation, reading and cultural awareness.

There are a variety of reasons why ESL/EFL students should become familiar with proverbs:

1. All native speakers have them in common.
2. Proverbs help build a native-like schema.
3 Proverbs, because of certain qualities they possess, are easier to remember than other bits of language.
4. Students enjoy learning proverbs.
5. Proverbs are easily identifiable by students as such and are often comparable in their language.
6. Proverbs are widely used today.
7. Proverbs are a means of working toward cross-cultural understanding.
8. Proverbs provide a painless way of working with pronunciation.

Properties of Proverbs

Let us first focus on some of the characteristics of proverbs. By understanding exactly what a proverb is and the characteristics it possesses, we can more clearly see how and why the proverb is a natural and excellent vehicle for teaching ESL/EFL students.

Just what exactly is a proverb? How is it defined? What are its distinguishing characteristics? Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1981) defines a proverb as "a brief popular epigram or maxim: adage." This definition needs

even more definition. Webster's defines a maxim as "a general truth, fundamental principle, or rule of conduct" and an adage as "a saying often in metaphorical form that embodies a common observation." For the most part, in this work we will be looking at both the proverb and the maxim (saying) as one and the same.

There are, however, more properties to proverbs. Understanding these provides the rationale for using them in the ESL/EFL classroom.

Table 1 Properties of Proverbs

1. Conversational	7. Figurative
2. Traditional	8. Prosodic
3. Spoken	9. Entertaining
4. Fixed Form	10. Humorous
5. Didactic	11. Potential Free Conversational Turn
6. General	

Source: Neal R. Norrick, How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs, (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1985), 67-72.

A brief explanation of these properties is perhaps in order. (1) "Conversational" here means that the proverb can be used without interrupting the flow of the conversation. The proverb is "woven into the fabric of the conversation."[1] (2) "Traditional" refers to a common use over a period of time. This is much like the general truth

[1]Neal Norrick, How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs, (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1985), 69.

or common observation in Webster's definition of a maxim or an adage. Related to this is "collective acceptance" which is defined as "something that has achieved social acceptance and is not only generally used but also accepted as correct."[2] (3) "Spoken" merely means that the proverb is spoken rather than sung, danced or chanted. This also includes the written form since what we speak, we can write. (4) "Fixed Form" should go without saying because of the proverb's traditional nature. It refers to the fact that proverbs are not found as the individual likes; the form has already been chosen by tradition. It is set. (5) "Didactic" means the proverb can suggest a proper or acceptable way of behavior or a general course of action in a given circumstance. For example, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is didactic in that it implies it is better to prevent rather than remedy. Of course, this does not mean that all proverbs are always didactic. "Easy come, easy go" does not suggest an acceptable way of behavior or a course of action. (6) "General" refers to the fact that the proverb is impersonal in nature and meaning even though used in a specific situation and context. (7) "Figurative" is non-literal and metaphorical. For example, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." uses the apple to

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[2]Joyce Penfield, Communicating with Quotes: The Igbo Case, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 99.

refer to a proper diet as prevention from sickness. (8) "Prosodic" refers to the poetic features of proverbs such as metric patterns, alliteration, parallelism, rhyme, rhythm and repetition. Prosody is considered to be an attribute rather than a defining character of proverb. (9) "Entertaining" is an optional property which means that the proverb can be such by being used cleverly in a conversation to make a point. (10) "Humorous" is also an optional property which proverbs may have. The humor may be intentional or unintentional. (11) "Potential free conversational turn" is a term that refers to the conversational nature of the proverb. It refers to the fact that proverbs are not dependent on a preceding sentence or turn in the conversation. For example:

* Excuse me.

\# Yes. Can I help you?

* Yes. How much is that?

\# It's $4.95.

In this conversation each turn depends on the preceding one for its interpretation. "Boys will be boys" needs no turn for its interpretation.[3]

Some or all of these properties or characteristics will be taken into account at a later point when we see how

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[3]Neal, 69.

Figure 1.

"Spend Your Money For a Rainy Day"

SPEND YOUR MONEY FOR A RAINY DAY.
Sitting inside a Volvo can be a very secure feeling. Even when heavy rain clouds your day.
And Volvo's concern for safety engineering isn't the only reason why.
Consider "On Call."SM Volvo's roadside assistance plan that can assist you 24 hours a day in all 50 states.
All it takes is dialing the toll-free number. Once you do, help is on the way. Come rain or come shine.
The Volvo 240. The family sedan that's more than just a fair-weather friend.
VOLVO
A car company you can believe in.
TACOMA
Topping Motors, Inc.
925 Market Street
(206) 572-3333
"On Call" is a service mark of Volvo North America Corporation and is offered in cooperation with the Amoco Motor Club. Limitations and restriction on certain plan benefits may apply.

Reprinted from The Tacoma News Tribune

Figure 2. "Be King in Your Castle"

Be King In Your Castle
Get SHOWTIME so the family can watch THE HONEYMOONERS . . . THE LOST EPISODES. 52 shows not seen since the '50s, found now only on SHOWTIME. Call your cable company and order SHOWTIME. Tell 'em Ralph sent you.
BANG! ZOOM! TIME TO SIGN UP!
Phone Lines Open Until 9:00 p.m.
CABLE TV PUGET SOUND
"What TV was meant to be"
597-7850

Reprinted from The Tacoma News Tribune

proverbs can be used in the teaching of ESL. Some characteristics lend themselves more to teaching specific skill areas than others. For example, the prosodic, spoken and conversational qualities of proverbs mentioned above make them a natural part of oral communication; thus, a natural vehicle for teaching it. Each specific area, oral communication, reading and culture, will be dealt with more in detail later as each area is focused on.

Uses of Proverbs Today: Advertising

Besides an understanding of the characteristics of proverbs, a brief look at how proverbs are used nowadays will show that they are still enormously popular. This popularity makes them a learning necessity for students of ESL/EFL if their understanding of English is to approximate that of native speakers. Just how commonly used are proverbs and sayings? The answer to this question probably lies in how they are used today. One of most common places to find proverbs being used nowadays is in advertising. Their usage in advertising is quite didactic as the examples will show. See Fig. 1. "Spend Your Money for a Rainy Day" and Fig. 2. "Be King in Your Castle."

Here we see how the saying, "Save it for a rainy day" has been reworded to say, "Spend your money for a rainy day." The advertiser is using the saying didactically in

order to sell his product but also with hopes of entertaining at the same time by making a play-on-words or play on proverbs, if you will. The fixed form of the proverb makes this possible. The fact that proverbs can be used as a free conversational turn lends itself well to their use in advertising. No introduction, no prior turn is needed for their use. What does seem to be happening here is that the advertiser is taking full advantage of the consumers' common knowledge of the language. By this, I mean that because of the proverb's traditional characteristic native speakers of English will generally have a common interpretation and understanding of this saying. "Save it for a rainy day" in my mind means keep whatever you have because at some time in the future you may need it. This ad is telling me to spend now because I may need this particular car in the future.

In the second example (one of my favorites) we see a play on proverbs being made with "A man's house is his castle." Again it seems the advertiser, a local cable t.v. company, is using this proverb didactically. If you would like to be or truly are king of your castle, like Ralph Kramden, you will call the cable company and subscribe. Again, the advertiser has taken advantage of the proverb's ability to be used as a free conversational turn. As do most advertisers, this advertiser has also taken advantage

of the traditional characteristic of the proverb. Because it is traditional, the native speaker can immediately associate the newly reworded proverb to the proverb's true fixed form.

These are just a couple of examples that point out rather typical uses of proverbs today's advertising. Certain characteristics of proverbs i.e. traditional, didactic and free conversational turn, make proverbs very easily adapted and ideal for use in this form. This usage, however, is only valid for native speakers with a background knowledge of the proverb.

Uses of Proverbs Today: The Newspaper

Proverbs are not only abundant in advertising. Another quite common use of proverbs and sayings today is found in newspaper articles. This everyday usage should point out clearly the importance of making our ESL/EFL students familiar with proverbs and sayings. Proverbs are so overwhelmingly common in everyday language that we put our students at a disadvantage by not introducing them to proverbs. See Fig. 3. "Two Mr. Wrongs Can Never Equal One Mr. Right." and Fig. 4. "Don't Cry Over It."

In the first example from an article, a play on proverbs has been used in the title to catch the reader's

Figure 3. "Two Mr. Wrongs Can Never Equal One Mr.Right"

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hers | Terry McMillan

Mark Matcho

Two Mr. Wrongs can never equal one Mr. Right.

MOST of my girlfriends happen to be black, smart, ambitious, idealistic, over the age of 30 and professionals. Despite the fact that most of us are doing what we want with our lives, the silver thread that binds us is one that sometimes causes us embarrassment: we don't have a husband or a steady man in our lives, though most of us would like to.

We know we spend too many precious hours on the phone, over dinner — everywhere — discussing the problems and perils of wanting, loving and needing black men. They're like an itch we can't reach and won't be satisfied until we scratch it. Even though many of us have had some wonderful relationships with black men, when they go sour, we are at a loss as to how and why we are the ones constantly blamed for these failures.

The truth of the matter is that some men just drain you dry.

• • •

Of course, others don't, but for at least the past 10 years I've had my share of those who do. As a black woman in America, it's disheartening and even frightening to accept the fact that because I've been labeled "strong and independent," I'm viewed as a threat to black men and my chances of finding Mr. Right are slim. At the age of 35, a single mother who has never been married, I've grown extremely tired of always being expected to be Miss Understanding, Miss Help-Boost-His-Ego, Miss Love-Him-at-All-Costs, Miss Sacrifice, Compromise and Acquiescence, Miss Telepathic, but more than anything, Miss Always-Put-Him-First.

According to a national black women's magazine, I've simply not done enough. As a matter of fact, there's obviously never going to be enough I can do. For a women's magazine, it's amazing how much attention it gives to trying to assess, second-guess, outthink and figure out what makes black men tick. In its pages, they tell us why black men don't open up, all the things black women do wrong in a relationship, why black men commit suicide, and why they're under so much stress.

Lest we ever forget, they've been victims of racism, and as a result, it's been hard for them to carve a place for themselves in mainstream society, hard for them to get an education, hard for them to take care of their families and in some cases hard for them to say no to drugs. For some black men, *everything* is difficult.

I'm not negating the impact that history and racism have had on black men, but there comes a time when you realize that the past can cripple you, prevent you from ever moving forward, even if it's only emotionally. Some of these men forget that black women are also victims of racism and sexism.

"I'm tired of being the Rock of Gibraltar," says one girlfriend. "I'm sick of babying them. I want to be babied sometimes."

"I'm tired of being accused of being a matriarch like it's some kind of crime," says another. "Don't they know that we're tired of running the households, making all the decisions, trying to figure out

Terry McMillan, whose first novel, "Mama," was published this year by Houghton-Mifflin, teaches creative writing at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

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Reprinted from The New York Times

Figure 4 "Don't Cry Over It"

B-4 The News Tribune, Tacoma, Wed., Jan. 22, 1986

Don't cry over it Staff photo by RUSS CARMACK

Spilled milk dampened Interstate 5 Tuesday afternoon when a truck southbound from a Mount Vernon dairy farm overturned at the Puyallup River bridge. Driver Jeff Zaizure and his helper, Terry Etroem, were treated at St. Joseph Hospital for minor injuries. The truck was owned by Washington Farms.

Reprinted from The Tacoma News Tribune

attention. The original proverb is of course "Two wrongs don't make a right." Its fixed form, general nature and collective acceptance make it ideal for use as a means of gaining attention. It is doubtful that a title such as "Black Women Frustrated at not Finding Relationships with Black Men" would have been as effective at attracting a wide range of readers even though this title expresses more clearly what the article is actually about. In this example, the general nature of the proverb has made this article more appealing to a greater number of possible readers.

The second example, "Don't Cry Over it", takes great advantage of the fact that members of a culture have a high degree of awareness of proverbs."[4] Partial quotation of the fixed form was used in this example because of the high degree of awareness.[5] It would be difficult to find a native speaker who didn't know what it was we shouldn't cry over. This of course is not the case with ESL students. Ask them what you shouldn't cry over and you will get a variety of answers ranging from a flunked test to being homesick. This example also tries to entertain by making clever use of the proverb. Again any entertainment value would be lost without prior knowledge of the proverb.

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[4]Penfield, 22.

[5]Ibid., 97.

The ESL/EFL student again misses all but the most literal interpretation of the proverb if s/he has not been made aware of the proverb's original form beforehand. Once this is done it becomes possible for the ESL/EFL student to identify how the caption was derived and begin to capture further meaning beyond the literal level.

To summarize the examples shown, all have made use of proverbs in a way which made full use of one or more of their characteristics. The first and second examples in advertising capitalized mainly on the proverbs' didactic qualities to try to persuade the consumer. The other examples from the newspaper capitalized on the proverbs traditional, cultural and fixed form characteristics. In order for the news writers and advertisers to do this requires a high degree of awareness by members of a culture. This high degree of awareness is something all of the examples have in common. Members of North American culture i.e. native speakers are able to immediately identify the proverb and identify with the proverb. Creating this awareness of proverbs is one of strongest reasons for teaching them to ESL/EFL students. Without any prior knowledge of proverbs ESL students are at a disadvantage when it comes to picking up on any play on proverbs or second level of meaning such as shown in the examples. They will be forced to deal with the literal meaning at best.

The eleven characteristics of proverbs along with how proverbs are used in present day society will be drawn from as a basis for teaching proverbs to ESL/EFL students. More specifically, this paper will focus on why proverbs should be used in the areas of Oral Communication and Pronunciation, Reading and Cultural Awareness. Each of the specific characteristics of proverbs lends itself to one or more of these skill areas. For example, the conversational and spoken characteristics of proverbs make them ideal for use in Oral Communication. Rhyme, rhythmic patterning and repetition are among some of the prosodic characteristics of proverbs which make them excellent vehicles for working with Pronunciation. In Reading, the overwhelming use of proverbs in advertising and everyday reading materials along with their figurative characteristic also make proverbs great for teaching a variety of reading skills and gaining valuable reading practice. The traditional characteristic of proverbs makes them unique little packages for teaching Cultural Awareness and comparing values and beliefs of different cultures. In the skill areas mentioned, these characteristics will be dealt with more in detail as they apply to each section. More discussion of the use of proverbs and how foreign students can benefit from learning them will also be presented as it pertains to each individual section. After discussing why proverbs should be used, how they can be used in each of

these areas will be looked at. A variety of activities for use in the ESL/EFL classroom focusing on each skill area will also be given.

III. PROVERBS IN TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION AND PRONUNCIATION

Rationale

Characteristics number one, three, five, eight and eleven from Table 1 say that proverbs are conversational, spoken, didactic, prosodic and have a potential free conversational turn. These properties are all related to oral communication. In the book Communicating with Quotes, Joyce Penfield calls the use of proverbs in oral communication "quoting behavior." She says, "The use of quotes to communicate a message ... is traditionally manifested through proverbs."[6] Ms. Penfield goes on to say that the use of proverbs is perhaps popular because it depersonalizes the message. Depersonalizing is a way of conveying a message indirectly and impersonally; due to the traditional nature of the proverb, the sayer of the proverb is not the author.[7] If this were the case, the proverb would most likely be used didactically. For example, if a teenage boy has just been left by his girlfriend, he might receive the following consolation from his mother when she tells him "There are

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[6] Ibid., 1.

[7] Ibid., 5.

other fish in the sea." The boy's mother wants him to know that he will soon find another girlfriend and that he shouldn't worry. The message here has been somewhat depersonalized in that the mother did not convey her message directly in her own words. Incidentally Ms. Penfield also mentions that highly urbanized areas of society tend to rely less on this type of quoting behavior. She has found it more common in rural areas.[8] (This may be a factor to consider before teaching depending on the region in which you live.) Also because the proverb is traditional in nature, it is commonly accepted as truth. Therefore the depersonalized didactic message from the mother to her son in the form of a proverb seems to carry more weight than if she had said,"Don't worry you"ll find another girlfriend."

So, the proverb in oral communication provides a means of conveying advice. This advice, because it is traditional and in a fixed form, tends to depersonalize the message giving what the speaker has to say more validity. The validity comes from the fact that the speaker of the proverb is not the author but rather the conveyer of a message which has been traditionally accepted as truth. With knowledge of proverbs it becomes possible for ESL/EFL students to recognize this

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[8]Ibid., 87.

traditional advice as such. Perhaps over time this knowledge of proverbs will also enable them to actively participate in this kind of "quoting behavior" thus giving them more "validity" among native speakers.

Another factor to consider in terms of oral communication is that proverbs most likely will be used in a context. In the example given above, the context is of a mother talking to her teenage son who has been left by his girlfriend. (It might be thought that this is in contrast to the characteristic of a potential free conversational turn, but it is not. The free conversational turn merely means that there does not have to be anything preceding the proverb for it to be understood.) Back to the preceding example, "There are other fish in the sea" can be understood with or without the context given. Of course, without the context the interpretation of the proverb might be different. Depending on the context, only one interpretation will be correct and will fit the situation. So, when presenting proverbs to ESL/EFL students, it is essential that a context or variety of contexts be given so that the proverb can be more fully understood. A better understanding of the proverb means students will be more apt to remember it.

There is still another characteristic which lends itself extremely well to proverbs being used in oral communication and that is that they can be prosodic. Prosodic means poetic.

If we think about what makes a poem, we might come up with factors like rhyme, repetition, alliteration and hyperbole. Ms. Penfield says, "Proverbs are characterized by different clausal construction, a rhythmic patterning of phrases and various poetic devices, eg. repetition, contrast and alliteration."[9] As an example I offer, "Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." In this proverb there is rhyme and the general rhythmic patterning that Ms. Penfield speaks of. It might also be said that this proverb is hyperbolic in that there seems to be some slight exaggeration about becoming wealthy and wise. It would be safe to say there are many people that even though they have gone to bed early and gotten up early all of their lives are still neither. It would be difficult to find a proverb that did not contain at least one poetic quality. An interesting point that comes about from the prosodic characteristic is as follows, "...the necessary terseness and attributes of the internal structure of proverbs, eg. rhythm and tonal structure, facilitates memorization."[10] This no doubt is a factor in their popularity among native speakers and certainly a plus for ESL/EFL students who are learning them.

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[9]Ibid., 23.

[10]Ibid.

Related to the ESL/EFL classroom, proverbs are quite well-rounded with regards to oral communication and pronunciation. Because proverbs contain rhyme and rhythmic patterning, this helps in practicing stress and intonation. Proverbs in oral communication are generally used in context and as "quoting behavior". Because proverbs have appropriate rhythm and tonal structure, memorization is made easier. All of these factors together make for effective practice. For example, this combination of factors could be beneficial if students needed extra practice with an isolated sound such as the initial "l" sound. This sound is found in the proverb, "Live and learn." The proverb here is an excellent way for the student to practice the sound being focused on. But it doesn't stop here. Since the proverb is generally used in a context, this gives the student the opportunity to recognize or use the proverb in a natural way both in the classroom and outside. In this way, the proverb is a means for the student to get thorough well-balanced practice. In the ESL/EFL classroom, the proverb then is an ideal tool for working with oral communication, pronunciation, stress and intonation.

Classroom Activities

As an overall format for using proverbs in the classroom, these activities, along with those in the Reading and Culture sections, are best utilized in conjunction with a brief,

routine, daily presentation and practice of proverbs. "A Proverb a Day...". These activities would include:

1. Discussion of the proverb and its interpretation
2. New vocabulary included in the proverb
3. Possible situations/contexts where the proverb might be used or might apply
4. Pronunciation/stress/intonation practice

This daily presentation would be well-suited for a warm-up activity to get the class talking and thinking.

ACTIVITY 1

Objective: To make students aware of the overwhelming evidence that native speakers of English have proverbs in common.

Procedure: Give students a survey sheet listing 10 fairly common proverbs all incomplete in some way. Students are asked to pose these to native speakers and take note of the answers. A possible list might include:

a. Don't cry over spilled_____.
b. Boys will be_____.
c. A bird in the hand is worth_____.
d. A penny saved is a penny_____.
e. Don't count your chickens before they're_____.
f. Money doesn't grow on_____.
g. A watched pot never_____.

h. Never look a _____ in the mouth.

i. _____is worth a thousand words.

j. Two is _____, three is a crowd.

After surveying native speakers, students come back to class and compare results of how widely recognized these proverbs are.

Some variations of this activity might include students asking other ESL students to complete the survey. The results could then be compared to those of native speakers.

As another follow-up to this activity students may generate their own situations, such as the teenager who has been left by his girlfriend, and ask native speakers to chose which they feel is the appropriate proverb for the situation from a list of proverbs.

ACTIVITY 2

Objective: To introduce students to new sounds and check pronunciation of isolated sounds.

Procedure: To do this effectively the teacher should be aware beforehand of the specific sounds included in each proverb. For example, in the proverb "Better late than never", some sounds the teacher might be listening for as the students speak would be the voiced th, the 'tt' pronounced as a 'd', the 'v', the 'b'and so on. Sounds may even be contrasted such as the 'v' and the 'b' here for those students who have

Spanish as a native language. The Sound/Color Chart and the Fidels from the Silent Way[11] can be very easily adapted for use with the proverb by familiarizing students first with the sound on the Fidel and then having them identify and produce that sound in the proverb. Other opportunities for students to check and work with pronunciation might be with the Human Computer (from Counseling Learning-Community Language Learning).[12] This particular activity along with most of the others mentioned is not merely a one time activity. In order to truly work with students' pronunciation this activity is best done on a routine basis. I have had success using proverbs as a warm-up at the beginning of class. It is actually quite a painless way of working with pronunciation.

ACTIVITY 3

Objective: To give advanced listening practice.

Procedure: A tape should be made or dialog read to the students where a proverb has been included in context. The proverb can be used in its original form or a play on proverbs can be used. After listening to the dialog, students are asked first to identify the proverb and second to explain its meaning in the context of the dialog.

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[11]Earl W. Stevick, Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways, (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1980), p. 37-64.

[12]Ibid., 85-213.

ACTIVITY 4

Objective: To give students an opportunity to practice using the proverbs. This activity can also be used to check understanding of the proverb in a group setting or even as an oral quiz.

Procedure: The class should first be divided into small groups of about 4 or 5 students. Each group is then given a list of about 7 to 10 proverbs which have been presented previously in class. Each group should have different proverbs on its lists. Time is then given for each group to come up with a situation where this proverb might be said. For example, Group 1 has the proverb "Two heads are better than one." Knowing this, Group 1 gives this situation to Group 2; e.g. You are trying to figure out your income tax form and you decide to ask a friend if he/she can help you. Group 2 is then given a chance to come up the appropriate proverb. Score can be kept of the groups that guess the most proverbs or the group that conveys the greatest number of correctly guessed situations.

IV. PROVERBS USED IN TEACHING READING

Rationale

Encountering proverbs for a native speaker while reading is quite natural. S/he probably does so daily and does not give it a second thought. The same is true for ESL students. In their everyday reading they no doubt encounter proverbs in some form or another on almost a daily basis if living in the U.S. Without any prior knowledge of proverbs they also will not give them a second thought. The examples which follow take great advantage of the fact that members of a culture have a high degree of awareness of proverbs. This awareness is part of a student's schema. Schema could be said to be a students' prior knowledge of the world, his/her frame of reference. It is what the reader brings along in his/her head, a base of knowledge and experience, when s/he reads. Schema, of course, varies from person to person and most definitely from culture to culture. While reading, in order for ESL/EFL students to be able to liken their schema to that of a native reader, they must be introduced to the proverb beforehand as a form of building their own schema in the target language. The philosopher, Kant, put it quite well

when he wrote, "New information has meaning only in relation to something one already knows."

To better show the role proverbs play in reading, please refer to Fig. 5. "Dear Abby" and Fig. 6. "Charity Begins at Work." In Fig. 5, a very typical illustration of proverbs in popular literature is given. The proverb, "Don't make a mountain out of a mole-hill", is alluded to when the writer asks if she is over-exaggerating her situation, something which the proverb advises against. Most likely, the ESL/EFL student could understand the reference here on his/her own, but with prior knowledge of the proverb, perhaps from a classroom situation, this example would be familiar rather than unfamiliar. The student would be dealing with a known rather than an unknown. My experience has shown there is security in familiarity.

In Fig. 6, "Charity begins at home" has been changed to read "Charity begins at work". As mentioned previously, I would call this an example of a play-on-proverbs. (If Appendix 2 of this paper is examined, many examples will be found that can be considered plays-on-proverbs.) The writer has taken a common well-known proverb and changed its fixed form to suit his needs for this article. For the ESL student to pick up on the play on proverbs he must first have a schema for the proverb itself in its original form. Here, even though the proverb's form has been

Figure 5. "Dear Abby"

Marijuana smoke clouds man's marriage

DEAR ABBY: Shortly after I was married, I learned that my husband is a habitual marijuana smoker and has been for the last 20 years. I'm 25 and he's 41 – a product of the '60s. Had I known this beforehand, I never would have married him. Unfortunately, I didn't find out until after I became pregnant, and now that we have a 3-month-old son, it's not easy to leave.

I asked him why the subject of pot never came up while we were dating, and he said he knew that I was "straight" so he never smoked in front of me. Even now, he never smokes in front of me, but I can smell it on him quite often. He says he doesn't "need" it, but I don't believe him because every time I step out – even for 20 minutes – I'll come back to the smell of pot.

He's a good husband and father, but we argue about this constantly. More and more I notice that his eyes are constantly bloodshot and he seems drowsy and lethargic and has to be reminded several times to do something. I'm concerned.

Am I making a mountain out of a molehill? How serious is this? Could he really quit if he wanted to? Please help me. I love him, but I can't live this way.

TORN

DEAR TORN: If your husband smokes pot "every time you step out," he's hooked. A 20-year habit

Dear Abby

She (and you) missed the point: It was not a "self-proclaiming" item, but an expression of love and respect for the teacher.

I have taught school for eight years and I drink my tea from a No. 1 Teacher cup, and I have a No. 1 Teacher pin in my jewelry box.

NANCY LAWRENCE

DEAR NANCY: I heard from hundreds of schoolteachers who wanted to teach "Reluctant Gift Collector" (and me) a lesson. They succeeded. Here's one from a teacher with a sense of humor:

DEAR ABBY: As a teacher in a major metropolitan area, I have a suggestion for "Reluctant Gift Collector." Be thankful for the gift, but next time suggest lottery tickets.

You have a better chance of winning the sweepstakes than having the school board give you a raise.

BROKE IN COLORADO

Don't put off writing thank-you notes, letters of sympathy, etc. because you don't know what to say. Get Abby's booklet, "How to Write Letters for All Occasions." Send a check or money order for $2.89 ($3.39 in Canada) to: Dear Abby, Letters Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, Ill. 61054 (postage and handling are included).

Abigail Van Buren is a syndicated columnist with Universal Press Syndicate.

Reprinted from The Tacoma News Tribune

Figure 6. "Charity Begings at Work"

Monday, June 5, 1987

Charity begins at work — and the competition is getting fierce

By Bill Virgin
The News Tribune

The Boeing Corp.'s Employees Good Neighbors Fund gets requests for donations totalling $350,000 a month from various charities and non-profit groups.

The Weyerhaeuser Foundation receives 30,000 separate requests for contributions each year from around the country.

Right now in the Puget Sound area, organizations are seeking $500 million for capital campaigns to construct buildings and facilities.

Every direction business turns, there's a hand out for money to support charities for diseases, arts coalitions, universities, youth organizations, and health and human services providers.

"The competition is fierce," said Frank Hagel, executive director of United Way of Pierce County.

Pacific Northwest corporations have responded. Although national figures suggest there's a leveling off in contributions, officials of the groups seeking corporate support say business donations in the Pacific Northwest are generally increasing.

That's not to say that the whole business of corporate donations isn't changing. There are a number of subtle trends under way: more small and medium-sized companies joining in, more fund-raising tied to special events or promotions, more businesses choosing to support certain groups or types of activities, rather than contribute to everyone.

The Conference Board, a national economic research organization, says contributions by U.S. businesses appear to be leveling after climbing for nearly two decades. Companies surveyed by the board predicted that when final numbers for 1986 are in, contributions will be off by 2.5 percent. Nearly half of the major donors that give $10 million or more a year said their contributions could fall by as much as 78 percent.

Those trends haven't shown up in the Northwest — yet.

"Generally we see business giving (as) even, to up slightly," Hagel said. The Council for Corporate Responsibility, an organization of King

Please see Charity, Page 4

Reprinted from The Tacoma News Tribune

changed, it still retains its didactic quality along with its traditional quality. While the ESL/EFL student may still perhaps pick up on the didactic quality of the new changed proverb, "Charity begins at work", unless he has already encountered this proverb, any traditional value that the culture places on this proverb is lost to him. The ESL/EFL student is missing out on the "collective acceptance" the culture places on the proverb, and therefore a hold on the larger sense of the article.

Also in the examples given here, there seems to be meaning on two levels. The first, which is the most obvious, is the literal meaning. The next goes beyond this literal meaning and touches a second level. This second level can only be reached if the reader has some prior knowledge or schema with regards to the proverb. Without this schema, working towards the second level of meaning is futile. Referring to example 2 again, if the student is to accurately develop a schema for the article s/he is about to read, some knowledge of the proverb "Charity begins at home" would be necessary. Using pre-reading exercises is a way to get at building schema. A pre-reading exercise is done before any reading takes place. It can be done in several ways, all of which have a positive affect on the students' understanding of the reading. To illustrate: if a pre-reading exercise were done with example 1, the picture of "Dear Abby" contained in the article or the

title can be used to generate background information. Who is she? What does she write about? Why do people write her? Answers to these questions can surely help students build a framework for understanding what is about to be read. The same holds true for the proverb. Any knowledge of the proverb would automatically provide a foot in the door for grasping the gist of the article beforehand. To prove this point, I recently polled an advanced ESL reading class on example number 2, "Charity begins at work." They were asked to tell me what they thought the article was about just by looking at the title and to tell me the proverb which was used. Of the students polled, only one could accurately describe any schema for the article due to a prior encounter with the proverb. He also was the only student who recognized the proverb, "Charity begins at home." This student obviously picked up on the proverb and the second level of meaning.

Perhaps recognizing the second level of meaning is not a high priority in the lower level ESL classes, but starting to develop this more native-like schema of proverbs certainly can begin in the lower levels; thus giving ESL students the needed background by the time they reach the higher levels. If this is the case, as students progress into the higher levels, grasping the second level of meaning will come naturally because of their familiarity with the proverb. This knowledge is necessary if students

are to obtain a level of competence in English comparable to that of native speakers.

As shown, proverbs are quite common in reading. In order for ESL/EFL students to be well prepared for encountering them, they must be introduced to them early on. This will provide the student with the base for understanding the more complex second level of meaning s/he needs in the advanced levels. In the classroom, proverbs can and should be used to build schema, to make inferences and to increase vocabulary. All can be done in a completely natural and enjoyable form.

Classroom Activities

All of the following activities could best be utilized after having presented students with several proverbs beforehand. Preferably students will have become familiar with the proverbs on a gradual, daily basis over a period of time. (See the general format for presenting proverbs included in the Oral Communication Activities section.)

ACTIVITY 1

Objective: To raise students' awareness of the importance and frequency of proverbs in everyday reading situations. To build schema via pre-reading activities.

Procedure: Before a proverb is first presented, students are shown one or more examples of plays on proverbs where the actual proverb has been reworded in the text. In

groups they are asked to extrapolate the proverb which has been used as the basis for the play on proverbs. Groups compare their answers. The actual proverb is then given. Students compare their groups' answer to the actual proverb.

As a follow-up to this activity, after having been presented with the proverb but before reading the actual article where the proverb or play on proverbs is found, students are asked to brainstorm ideas as to what the reading is about based on their knowledge of the proverb. Any and all ideas are acceptable.

ACTIVITY 2

Objective: To give students the opportunity to practice making inferences from reading.

Procedure: To begin this exercise a list of familiar proverbs from which to choose should be given to the students. Two types of readings may be used. Either actual examples of plays on proverbs or a written situation, perhaps a dialog, for which a proverb would be appropriate. In groups, students are asked to come up with the appropriate proverb that matches the reading. For example, the following situation might be given:

* "This is the pits."

"What's wrong?"

* "My boyfriend promised to call me tonight and the phone just won't ring. If I have to wait any more, I'll scream."

"Why don't you call him yourself?"

Having read this situation students can then discuss the proverb that would be appropriate. In this case the appropriate proverb would be "A watched pot never boils". By inferring the girl waiting for the call is anxious, her boyfriend's call seems to her to be slow in coming. In groups, students can also write their own dialogs and exchange them with other groups to match an appropriate proverb to the situation.

ACTIVITY 3

Objective: To supplement free reading time. (Free reading time sets aside time that allows students to read whatever they choose in class.)

Procedure: This activity would be long running--perhaps throughout the life of the class. As students read on their own, a running scrap book or bulletin board can be kept of all examples of proverbs found in the students' reading from both inside or outside of class.

ACTIVITY 4

Objective: To increase students' vocabulary.

Procedure: Besides the new vocabulary that is likely to come up when introducing students to proverbs, more new

vocabulary can be derived by looking for synonyms and antonyms where possible. For example, in the proverb "Beauty is only skin deep", ask students for the antonym of beauty. The students can also be asked for synonyms of beauty such as loveliness. Students can be asked to substitute these synonyms in the proverb making sure to choose the appropriate part of speech to see how the meaning changes if at all. All of this can be done in a natural way through the context of the proverb. The teacher should record new vocabulary for the proverbs for review at a later date. (For an excellent review and assessment, a game can be played with words that students have found synonyms and antonyms for. For example, students, in pairs, put these words on 3 by 5 cards. This is best done using either only synonyms or only antonyms. Students should write "beautiful" on one card and its antonym, "ugly" on another. After doing this for several new words, students will have enough cards to play "Concentration". This is played putting all of the cards face down on a table. Students then try to find the matching pairs by turning over two of the cards at a time. This is done until all of the cards have been turned over. The student with the most pairs wins. Other games are possible with the cards, for example, "Go Fish" based on the old card game. Students will come up with their own variations and new games if given a chance.)

V. PROVERBS IN TEACHING CULTURAL AWARENESS

> The use of language is patterned within each society in culture specific ways. Culture is a schema for understanding the world.
>
> Jan Mukarovsky from
> Communicating with Quotes

> Emphasis has been placed upon finding differences among peoples, although a certain uniformity of human nature seems to spell itself out in proverbs.
>
> Joseph Raymond
> from "Tensions in
> Proverbs: More Light on
> International Understanding"

Rationale

A recurring theme throughout this work has been the fact that proverbs are a universal cultural phenomenon. They exist in all cultures. What can be different, however, is the interpretation that is given them along with a unique way of expressing the idea. For example, "Love is blind" taken from English can be likened to "Nobody's sweetheart is ugly" which was told to me by a student from Taiwan. Obviously the idea or belief behind the proverb is quite similar, yet the way of expressing this is very different. There do seem to be differences in the interpretation also. "Love is blind" tends to refer to

the fact that those in love are blind to each other's faults of all kinds while the Chinese version seems to put more emphasis on only the physical aspect. Overall, the values and beliefs that are portrayed through proverbs are not exclusive to one culture. In this way proverbs in the ESL/EFL classroom can be used to link or at least let students see the link between cultures. They might also see that we are not all that different from each other after all.

From Table 1, The Properties of Proverbs, the traditional characteristic of proverbs is most definitely cultural. As mentioned previously, traditional refers to the common use of the proverb over a period of time. Some widely quoted proverbs in English can be traced back to Latin, Shakespeare, Ben Franklin and the Bible. In this manner, proverbs are certainly windows into a culture's past. Their traditional bits of wisdom have been accepted by a culture at one point or another to be true and have been passed along to later generations. The term "collective acceptance" describes this phenomenon. In order for this to happen, the proverb must achieve social acceptance by a culture. Social acceptance implies the proverb is generally considered by a culture to be correct. This social acceptance can be paralleled to the values and beliefs that all cultures hold.

In their essay "Proverbs and Practical Reasoning: A Study in Socio-Logic", Paul Goodwin and Joseph Wenzel refer to shared social character and a socially developed sense of practical reasoning as "socio-logic."[13] The writers go on to say that the rules of socio-logic of a culture are best manifested in proverbs, an immediately intelligible form of logic. "Proverbs offer a general set of rational strategies for deliberating about life's problems."[14] Here, of course, "life" refers to each specific culture. Each culture will have its own way of contemplating, rationalizing and solving its problems. Proverbs are one vehicle a culture uses for doing so.

Referring to the list of proverbs in Appendix 1 and keeping in mind the values and beliefs of this culture, proverbs can be found that reflect one or more values and beliefs. For example, "A penny saved is a penny earned" tells us it's important to be thrifty; "Spare the rod and spoil the child" says discipline is very important; "First come, first served" tells us the value of being punctual, and "Money talks" shows the value this society places on

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[13]Paul D. Goodwin and Joseph W. Wenzel, "Proverbs and Practical Reasoning: A Study in Socio-Logic" in The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb, eds. Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1981), 140.

[14]Ibid., 158.

money. These are some examples that clearly point out values that this society holds. Proverbs can be grouped together according to the values they represent. Many refer to being thrifty, to the importance of hard work or to the value of the individual. While most proverbs do have a commonly accepted value and belief underneath the surface meaning, some of course may not. In other proverbs, the values and beliefs reflected may not be accurate due to societal changes. This can also be presented. The following is a more complete list of values and beliefs found in English proverbs:

1. Thriftiness
2. Hard Work
3. Materialism/Importance of Money
4. Equal Opportunity
5. Competition
6. Individualism/Self-reliance
7. Optimism
8. Importance of Time
9. Adventure
10. Prevention
11. Organization
12. Friendship
13. Wisdom
14. Silence

15. Discipline
16. Family Relations
17. Getting Along with Others/Cooperation
18. Quality of Work
19. Fun/Amusement
20. Conservatism/Caution
21. Patience
22. Youth
23. Appearance
24. Brevity
25. Action

(See Appendix 1 for a list of proverbs and the value and belief which corresponds.)

The values and beliefs mentioned here and others that proverbs may contain most certainly are not exclusive to this culture. Proverbs in the ESL classroom can serve as a bridge between the students' culture and this one. Through proverbs, the ESL student can see how the two cultures are similar rather than different. In this way, proverbs are a very natural vehicle for greater cross-cultural understanding. Joseph Raymond in his essay entitled "Tensions in Proverbs" seemed to sum it up quite well when he wrote:

We need other links in the chain of international thinking and emotions. It is proposed here that proverbs

form one link, providing countless clues to comprehending other minds. Every clue contributes to the total picture. (Raymond 1981, 305) [15]

Classroom Activities

(The general format for presenting proverbs is stated in the Oral Communication Activities section.)

ACTIVITY 1

Objective: To raise students awareness of values and beliefs of their culture and those of the target culture.

Procedure: Students should first be aware of what a value and a belief are. From the proverb that is given, students are asked to pull out the value and belief behind the proverb. This can then be compared to similar or different values and beliefs which may be held in the students' culture. (I prefer to focus more on the similarities because of students' natural tendencies to focus on the differences.)

ACTIVITY 2

Objective: To give students an opportunity to examine proverbs for a commonly held value or belief.

Procedure: Students are given a list of 20 to 30 proverbs which they have been previously introduced to. In groups

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[15] Joseph Raymond, "Tensions in Proverbs: More light on International Understanding", Ibid., 305.

or as a class, they are given a value, such as being thrifty, and are asked to pick out proverbs that portray this particular value. Answers can be compared and discussed between groups. (Also useful for developing skills in reading and making inferences.)

APPENDIX 1

PROVERBS and SAYINGS with
CORRESPONDING VALUE and BELIEF

Two heads are better than one. (Cooperation)(Friendship)

Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.
(Conservatism/Caution)

Two wrongs don't make a right.(Getting Along)

There are other fish in the sea. (Optimism)

It's no use crying over spilled milk.(Optimism)

If you can't beat them, join them.
(Competition)(Cooperation)

First come, first served. (Individualism/Self-reliance)

Two is company, three is a crowd. (Friendship)

A man is known by the company he keeps. (Appearance)

He can't see the forest for the trees. (Wisdom)

Spare the rod and spoil the child. (Discipline)

Charity begins at home. (Family Relations)

A man's house is his castle. (Individualism/Self-reliance)

When the cat is away, the mice will play. (Fun/Amusement)

Don't put the cart before the horse. (Organization)

Curiosity killed the cat. (Conservatism/Caution)

Never cross a bridge until you come to it. (Optimism)

Boys will be boys. (Fun/Amusement)

Don't judge a book by its cover. (Conservatism/Caution)

Better bowlegs than no legs at all. (Optimism)

Beauty is only skin deep. (Conservatism/Caution)

His bark is worse than his bite. (Getting Along)

Actions speak louder than words. (Silence)(Hard Work)(Action)

Easy come, easy go. (Optimism)

The early bird catches the worm. (Hard Work)(Equal Opportunity)

An elephant never forgets.

Don't make a mountain out of a mole-hill.

A sucker is born every minute. (Wisdom)

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. (Conservatism/Caution)

A stitch in time saves nine. (Prevention)

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. (Prevention)(Conservatism/Caution)

Better late than never. (Importance of Time)

Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. (Hard Work)(Equal Opportunity)

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. (Prevention)

A penny saved is a penny earned. (Thriftiness)

There's no fool like an old fool. (Wisdom)

A rolling stone gathers no moss. (Adventure)or(Security)

A place for everything and everything in its place. (Organization)

No news is good news. (Optimism)

Tomorrow never comes. (Importance of Time)

Make hay while the sun shines. (Hard Work)(Importance of Time)